



INSTRUCT-O-GRAM

THE HANDS-ON TRAINING GUIDE FOR THE FIRE INSTRUCTOR

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Effective Communication

TASK

Being able to communicate effectively is vital to you and your department. This communication will take place both formally and informally. Just think how much time in a work period you spend communicating with not only your peers and subordinates but also with the citizens that you serve. Failure to be able to effectively communicate will result in organizational failures. It is crucial that fire officers possess and maintain excellent communication skills. Good communication skills are essential in both your work and in your everyday life.

OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to describe the communication process.
2. The student will be able to describe the need for effective personal communications.
3. The student will be able to describe ways of improving oral communications.
4. The student will be able to describe ways to improve listening skills.
5. The student will be able to describe ways to improve writing skills.

INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS

1. Video tapes that illustrate good speakers
2. Examples of well written documents
3. A videotape recorder
4. Computer access
5. Various locations and audiences for students to speak to

ESTIMATED TEACHING TIME

The time to deliver this program will vary from instructor to instructor whereas each group of students will have different strengths and weaknesses. This is a program that does not need to be time specific. Spend as much time as necessary to facilitate the development of your students to the desired functional level.

MOTIVATING THE STUDENT

Good communications skills have a positive impact on every aspect of your work. Being able to communicate effectively enhances your leadership ability, helps you gain respect from your supervisors and peers, and makes you more effective in talking to the public, the media, and others. Failure to communicate effectively and efficiently could have devastating effects on the outcomes of certain situations. In emergency scene operations the lack of effective communications could

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mean the difference between life and death. To broaden the spectrum we must now look to the critical nature of all communications. Just as communications on emergency scenes are crucial, so too are everyday communications.

PRESENTATION

A. The Importance of Communication in Our Work

1. Formal versus Informal Communication

- a. Formal Communication – Conducted according to established standards. Tends to follow specific customs, rules and practices.

- ◆ Formal orders
- ◆ Standard Operating Guidelines
- ◆ Directives
- ◆ Official correspondence

- b. Informal Communication – Simpler and more spontaneous

- ◆ Memos
- ◆ E-mails
- ◆ Notes

2. Forms of Personal Communication

- a. Oral or Spoken – Most commonly used method

- ◆ Oral communications can be one-way or two-way
- ◆ To one or more receivers

- b. Written – Used to provide a record for future reference

- c. Communication without words

- ◆ Body language

- d. Other forms of communications

- ◆ Signs
- ◆ Symbols

3. Elements of the Communication Process

- a. **Communication Model** – The communications process is made up of a five elements.

- ◆ **Sender** – The individual who has information and wishes to send it. He or she must determine which way is the best to communicate and begin.
- ◆ **Message** – Information which is being sent
- ◆ **Medium** – How the message is being sent
- ◆ **Receiver** – Person(s) receiving the message
- ◆ **Feedback** – Tells the sender the message has been received and it has been understood

B. Oral Communication

Review the process of oral communications setting, such as telephone and face-to-face. Most individuals prefer face-to-face contact when speaking to one another. This allows the feedback process to work best. This also allows for the other forms of communication to be utilized.

1. Barriers to Effective Communication – Factors that prevent or reduce the transmitting and receiving of the message

- a. Physical barriers

- ◆ The environment
- ◆ Walls
- ◆ Distance
- ◆ Background noise

- b. Personal barriers – These factors limit communications due to a psychological barrier. Oftentimes these barriers are much worse than physical barriers.

- ◆ Judgments
- ◆ Emotions
- ◆ Social values

- c. Semantic barriers

- ◆ Arise from language barriers
 - Technical terms
 - Big words
 - Definition of words
 - Jargon

2. Part of the Communication Process is Listening

- a. Active listening – The deliberate and apparent process by which one focuses attention on the communication of another
- b. Unclear messages – When communication is not clear the receiver should ask questions to try to clarify message.

- ◆ Example: So let me make sure I understand what you are saying. You want me to get a pike pole and take it to sector 3?

- c. When you are actively listening, three important things happen:

- ◆ You actually hear what is being said
- ◆ You are more likely to remember what is said
- ◆ You show respect for the sender

3. Communication is a Part of Leadership

- a. Show respect to those to whom you are communicating
- b. Avoid generalities
- c. Avoid exaggerations
- d. Remember to make communications a two-way process

4. Making Practical Use of Effective Communications

- a. State observations
- b. Allow and encourage feedback
- c. Facilitate the communication process – get others to communicate

5. Other Ways to Improve Your Speech Communication

- a. Public speaking courses
- b. Using videotapes to enhance your communication skills
- c. Practicing communication
- d. Courses offered by Dale Carnegie or Toast Masters International
- e. Leadership development programs (like Fire Officer I)

C. Improving Writing Skills

Effective fire officers must be able to write.

1. Principles of Effective Writing

- a. Consider the reader

- ◆ Consider who the target readers are
- ◆ Use plain English
- ◆ Avoid confusing abbreviations, technical terms and jargon. These are like speed bumps on a road. They slow down the reader and oftentimes break the flow of information from the sender to the receiver.

- ◆ If hand written

- Write legibly
- Write neatly

- ◆ Written so as it is easy to see, making it easier to read

- b. Emphasis

- ◆ Memos, letters, and directives should be limited to one topic

- c. Brevity

- ◆ Short, sweet and to the point
- ◆ This prevents the reader from becoming:

- Confused
- Bored

- d. Simplicity

- ◆ Keep it simple

- ◆ Use terminology and phrases that are easy to understand
 - ◆ Specific terms or phrases only when necessary
- e. Objectivity
- ◆ State facts
 - ◆ Avoid personal bias comments
 - ◆ Use language that is appropriate for the reader and the occasion
- f. Mechanical accuracy
- ◆ Make sure that you capitalize only when required.
 - ◆ Punctuation
 - ◆ Sentence structure is appropriate
 - ◆ Underlining or italics are used to identify titles of books, specific works of art, plays, periodicals
- g. Putting it all together
- ◆ This is when you begin to put your writing together. You want to start with the facts and begin to elaborate from this point keeping in mind your readers are busy and tend to only rush through most of what they read. Be straight to the point utilizing short paragraphs and writings
- h. Review your work
- ◆ Make sure to read over your work or have someone else read it

RESOURCES

North Carolina Fire and Rescue Commission Fire Officer 1 Curriculum, North Carolina Officer of State Fire Marshal

Great Oaks Institute of Technology Fire Officer I Curriculum, Great Oaks Institute of Technology, Cincinnati, Ohio

Company Officer, Clinton H. Smoke, Delmar Publishing, First Edition, 1999

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Douglas Cline is a 22-year veteran of the fire service and a Captain with the Chapel Hill (NC) Fire Department, currently assigned to Station 3. He is a North Carolina Level II Fire Instructor, National Fire Academy Instructor for the Office of State Fire Marshal, an EMT-Paramedic instructor/coordinator for the North Carolina Office of Emergency Medical Services, Instructor in the Fire Science Program at Durham Technical Community College, and an Adjunct Instructor at Great Oaks Institute of Technology in the Public Safety Division. Cline is a member of the International Society of Fire Service Instructors Board where he serves as Eastern Regional Director.

Douglas Cline is scheduled to present **Searching in Modern Environments: Where's the Victim?** at 12:00 pm on Friday, July 25, 2003 at **Firehouse Expo 2003**. He will also serve as a faculty member for the **Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century: Roles and Responsibilities of the Company Officer** program presented by ISFSI at 11:00 am on Wednesday, July 23, 2003.

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